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ABSTRACT

This paper examines ERIC from a multicultural perspective. The questions guiding the research include: (1) "How extensive is ERIC's coverage of multicultural issues? What are selection policies for 'Resources in Education' (RIE) and 'Current Index to Journals in Education' (CIJE), the two main components of the database?"; (2) "Are journals and documents in ERIC adequate to support the widening pool of multicultural teaching in our schools?"; (3) "What search skills do students need to retrieve multicultural materials through ERIC?"; and (4) "What additional questions should we be asking about access to multicultural information?" This bibliographic study was limited to women's studies, African-American studies, American Indian studies, and multicultural education. The paper reports a generally favorable representation of these groups in the database but expresses some concerns about the broader social issues suggested by the depth of coverage, or lack of, for certain groups. The document suggests additional databases and indexes in the chosen topic areas that could supplement the perceived shortcomings in the ERIC coverage for research. (EH)

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ERIC on CD-ROM as a Multicultural Research Tool
for Off-Campus Students

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Katherine E. Holmes
Lesley College
1995

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ERIC ON CD-ROM AS A MULTICULTURAL RESEARCH TOOL FOR OFF-CAMPUS STUDENTS

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Introduction

Multicultural issues, electronic resources, and growing off-campus enrollments are having a profound effect on Lesley College Library. A college-wide commitment to multiculturalism has led the effort to diversify collections and services. Access to electronic information has exploded with CD-ROM databases, the online catalog, the Internet and a growing campus network. Meanwhile, graduate programs have proliferated with almost 5,000 students on-campus and off-campus, in 15 states around the country. Most of those students are teachers earning Master's Degrees in education. And most of them use ERIC as their primary source of scholarly information.

The purpose of this investigation is to evaluate ERIC's coverage and accessibility for multicultural issues. The following questions have motivated the study:

- 1) How extensive is ERIC's coverage of multicultural issues? What are selection policies for RIE and CIJE, the two main components of the database?
- 2) Are journals and documents in ERIC adequate to support the widening pool of multicultural teaching in our schools?
- 3) What search skills do students need to retrieve multicultural materials through ERIC?
- 4) What additional questions should we be asking about access to multicultural information?

Background

Lesley College enrolls about 4,000 off-campus students in Master's Degree programs in education, counseling psychology and management. Library access for off-campus students is based on cooperative agreements with local college and university libraries, most of whom offer public access to ERIC on CD-ROM. Library agreements rarely include library instruction, so students need to be quite independent in their library use. Library Resources Handbooks provide basic instructional support by describing a variety of research strategies and tools, especially ERIC.

Since 1993, diversity issues have taken center stage at Lesley College. Through the Diversity Initiative, the college is committed to increasing

diversity among students, faculty and staff; reforming curriculum and pedagogy to incorporate diverse knowledge and perspectives; and preparing students to become positive forces for diversity within their communities. (Lesley College Diversity Initiative, 1994.) The Graduate School faculty is working across disciplines to redesign curriculum and pedagogy for all programs, on-campus and off-campus. In the library, multicultural education and diversity issues are among the top priorities guiding development of collections and services.

As most Lesley College graduate students are teachers, academic programs must prepare teachers to respond to the multicultural needs of their classrooms. Students need to educate themselves about their own culture and the cultures of their pupils, about the major ethnic groups in the United States, and about the learning styles and world views of each of these groups. Graduate work must be supported by access to scholarly research, pedagogical material, and a broad array of information about and from many cultures.

Multicultural education is defined in many ways by different authors. The following description is offered by Banks and Banks:

Multicultural education is an idea, an educational reform movement, and a process whose major goal is to change the structure of educational institutions so that male and female students, exceptional students, and students who are members of diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups will have an equal chance to achieve academically in school. (1993, 1).

Current demographics paint a clear picture of mostly white middle-class female teachers educating a population of students that are increasingly students of color, whose native language is not English, and whose culture differs dramatically from that of their teachers. (Fuller 1992; Sleeter & Grant 1993; Banks & Banks 1993.) The challenge to teacher education programs is both to recruit students from diverse cultural groups and to prepare all teachers to value diversity and educate students from all cultural backgrounds (Fuller 1992).

Scholars in the field of multicultural education report that lack of support and recognition relegate their research to the margins of academia. Grant and Millar (1992) describe an academic ethnocentrism in which research by scholars of color and by women is undervalued and ghettoized—often not accepted as solid scholarship or not published in mainstream journals. Grant and Millar charge that shifting criteria and subjective standards benefit white male scholarship (1992). Zeichner (1993) obtained many of the articles in his extensive bibliography “Educating Teachers for Cultural Diversity” from fugitive literature, through personal contacts rather than literature searches.

In the case of multicultural education, broad access to diverse, nontraditional sources of information is critical to effective research.

With these issues in mind, I began to reflect on the sources of information I present to our students, especially ERIC. I began to wonder if ERIC gives sufficient breadth and depth of coverage in multicultural education to support the information needs of our Master's Degree students. As I searched the library literature for articles on ERIC, I was surprised at how little was written on the scope and content of the database. I began to wonder if we librarians have come to depend on ERIC so heavily that we take its contents for granted. With the Lesley College Diversity Initiative in my heart, and nagging questions of access to multicultural information in my mind, I began to look more closely at the ERIC database.

ERIC

An acronym for Education Resources Information Center, ERIC is a vast network of Clearinghouses and agencies that produce an enormous database of education resources and a growing array of information services. The ERIC database is an index and abstracting service comprising two parts: *Current Journals in Education*, (CIJE) and *Resources in Education*, (RIE) a collection of documents available in many libraries on microfiche. ERIC on CD-ROM is estimated to be the most widely used of all CD-ROM products. (Nicholls & Holtmann 1989). In 1993, the database contained over 800,000 bibliographic records to documents and journal articles related to education. (Brandhorst 1994). That same year, ERIC expanded its offerings as it began indexing "the major education book literature" as well. (OERI, 1992). AskERIC on the Internet extends ERIC access to students without local access to a CD-ROM product.

Documents and journals are selected for ERIC by ERIC Clearinghouses according to selection criteria spelled out in the *ERIC Processing Manual* (Brandhorst 1991). Among the selection criteria for CIJE are the following:

- Coverage of designated core education journals must be "cover-to-cover."
- Articles in education-related journals are selected...strictly on the basis of their relationship to...education.
- It is permissible...to input any good quality education-related article that may be detected in some other journal not regularly covered. (Brandhorst 1991, III-34).

The distinction between these three categories of journal titles is critical to understanding the scope of the database. Titles in the first two categories are contained in the "Source Journal Index" in the front

of each issue of CIJE . For example, *Harvard Educational Review* is a core education journal, indexed from cover-to-cover. *American Indian Quarterly* is considered "education-related" and is indexed selectively. Both of these titles are listed in "Source Journal Index". Although the *Journal of Black Psychology* is not considered an education-related journal and is not listed in "Source Journal Index" (May 1995) nevertheless 35 education-related articles from the *Journal of Black Psychology* are referenced in the database from 1992-March 1995.

Among the selection criteria for RIE are the following:

All documents...must have a demonstrable connection with and relevance to the field of education.... Quality is the single most important selection criterion.... Documents about a disciplinary or subject-matter area, but not specifically designed for educational use, must have the link to education explicitly drawn in order to be selected. (Brandhorst 1991, III-3).

For example, ERIC selects women's studies or feminist materials that are directly applicable to the classroom, but does not select broadly across the discipline.

The most important aspect of these selection policies for multicultural education research may be the following questions to test for relevance:

- Are emerging professional interests and topics treated, e.g., bilingual education, women's equity...etc.?
- Does the document present work on the "frontier" knowledge area of a particular subject...?
- Are answers offered to current social problems...?
- Does the document provide basic up-to-date and comprehensive background or reference information on a subject? (Brandhorst 1991, III-13).

These questions would seem to encourage the selection of multicultural resources, as they are on the "frontier" of a new and growing field, that has as its major focus addressing social problems through education reform. However, newsletters as well as material that only impact a local community without being generalizable to other areas are generally not selected. (Brandhorst 1991).

In the library literature on ERIC, subject access is the most frequent topic of discussion. Carter (1994) discusses the search problems caused by descriptors that are too broad, encompassing many diverse cultural groups under one enormous heading such as American Indians. Nicholls & Holtmann (1989) enumerate the difficulties in searching for women's studies literature because of imprecise ERIC descriptors.

In light of these charges, it is appropriate to examine ERIC for breadth of coverage in multicultural subject areas, depth of coverage through access to mainstream and nontraditional sources of thought and research, and ease of access for searching multicultural topics in the database.

Methodology

ERIC was examined for coverage in multicultural education and diversity topics and for access to these topics through the thesaurus. From the many cultural groups and diversity issues possible, four topic areas were chosen as representative of the types of diversity concerns being addressed in Lesley graduate courses in education. Those topic areas are African American studies, American Indian studies, women's studies, and multicultural education.

Step 1. Breadth of Coverage. To evaluate the breadth of coverage in topic areas, ERIC searches were conducted in each topic area and the total number of records counted and compared. Descriptors were selected through the on-line thesaurus, as well as all narrower terms and many related terms. (Descriptors for African Americans are Blacks-; the primary descriptor for women and girls is Females.) Descriptors were combined with "or" to obtain a count of the overall number of records in the topic areas. Results were compared to indicate how broadly each area is covered in the database. Any issues that pertain to more than one cultural group, such as racial bias, were grouped together under Multicultural Education. Duplicate results that contain references previously obtained in the cultural group searches were retained in the count, as they indicate the wealth of results a user would obtain in this topic area.

Step 2. Depth of Coverage. To evaluate the depth of coverage in topic areas, searches were conducted to identify bibliographies in each topic area. Results from Step 1 were limited by the operator "and" with the descriptors Bibliographies and Annotated Bibliographies. Records were reviewed for depth of access to primary sources and fugitive material.

Step 3. Journal Titles. In order to gauge the extent to which multicultural research is being captured by ERIC, a selective database of journal titles was created for each topic area. Specialized bibliographies were sampled from reference collections, ERIC documents, and journals as well as reference lists from monographs by several leading researchers in multicultural education. Additional diversity titles appropriate for academic libraries were identified in *Magazines for libraries* (Katz & Katz 1995) and *Index to Black Periodicals* (1992). Journal titles were then compared to the CIJE "Source Journal Index" (May 1995) and ERIC on SilverPlatter for 1992-March 1995. This

comparison gives an indication of the degree to which ERIC recognizes the journals of that field.

Step 4. The *Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors* was examined for subject access to the four topic areas, with special attention to new descriptors added in the 13th edition (1995).

Findings

Step 1. Breadth of Coverage. Table 1 illustrates overall search results in the three cultural group topic areas.

Table 1. Overall Search Results		
	Records	Percent
African Americans	2,793	33.8%
American Indians	1,563	18.9%
Women	3,898	47.2%
Total	8,254	100.0%

Of the three cultural groups, the most records were obtained on women's issues (47.2%). This total includes every article with the descriptor Females (2747), and does not necessarily represent exclusively feminist research. It does, however, indicate broad access to information on Females throughout the database. The descriptor Womens Studies only accounts for 251 records. American Indians obtained the fewest records, with only 18.9% of the total items. By estimating the quantity of information available, these counts give a sense of the breadth of coverage in the topic areas.

Total number of records in multicultural education were 9,452. This indicates a large reservoir of articles and documents on multicultural, intercultural, racial and ethnic issues selected from 1992 to the present.

Step 2. Depth of Coverage. Table 2 illustrates the numbers of bibliographies obtained for each cultural group. Comparing the bibliographies of the three cultural groups, 42% cover women, 33% cover American Indians, and 24.5% cover African Americans.

Table 2. Cultural Group Bibliographies on ERIC						
	Total	Percent	Children's Literature		Exclusive Coverage	
African Am.	39	24.50%	8	20.50%	19	48.70%
Am. Indians	53	33.30%	15	28.30%	34	64.20%
Women	67	42.10%	5	14.50%	43	64.20%
TOTAL	159	99.90%				

African Americans. Thirty-nine bibliographies contain material on African Americans. Of these, eight (20.5%) focus on children's literature, 19 (48.7%) cover African Americans exclusively. Most of the bibliographies on African Americans are limited in scope--special formats for the blind, audio-visual materials, topics of dance, baseball, Malcolm X or children's literature. Only one exhaustive general bibliography on African Americans has been located on ERIC, *Guide to Selected African-American Materials in the UTK Libraries* by Bridges and Prescod (1993).

American Indians. Fifty-three bibliographies contain references on American Indians. Of these, 15 (28.3%) focus on children's literature; 34 (64.2%) cover American Indians exclusively. These bibliographies reflect a broad concern for social problems, history, and language, as well as children's literature and teaching resources. Several are exhaustive listings of primary sources and fugitive materials.

Women. Sixty-seven bibliographies contain material on women's issues. Of these, five (14.5%) focus on children's literature; 43 (64%) cover women's issues exclusively. These bibliographies range widely over topics such as sex bias and stereotyping, women at work, women in higher education, women athletes, poets, and authors, women of the frontier, women of color and women of Appalachia. Many are exhaustive listings of primary sources and fugitive materials. Women's bibliographies include the fewest lists of children's books, indicating a higher percentage of research material in this field.

These findings indicate a scarcity of research materials on African Americans in the ERIC database. Although references to African Americans appear in many of the multicultural bibliographies, a shortage of substantive single-issue bibliographies indicates a serious gap in ERIC's depth of coverage in that field. This lack made it difficult to obtain bibliographies for this investigation.

Half of all the bibliographies retrieved were in the broad arena of multicultural research (see Table 3), including multilingual, cross-

cultural, and intercultural materials, as well as references to discrimination and bias. Of these bibliographies, 26 (19.4%) focus on children's literature. Many of the 134 bibliographies are extensive and cover diverse approaches to the field of multicultural research.

Table 3. Multicultural Bibliographies on ERIC						
	Total		Children's Literature		Exclusive Coverage	
Multicultural	134	45.7%	26	19.4%	n/a	n/a

The many in-depth bibliographies include such diverse topics as immigrants, discrimination, comparative linguistics, and multiple sources of children's literature and curriculum materials.

In terms of children's literature, the average number of bibliographies of books for children or young adults in the four topic areas is 16%, the lowest percentage being on women (14.5%), the highest on American Indians (28.3%). Children's literature is an important resource for teachers, but does not indicate the availability of research literature. A range of 16-20% seems appropriate to devote to children's titles, allowing a substantial collection of materials to support higher level research for secondary and post-secondary students and educators.

Step 3. Journal Titles. Table 4 illustrates the number of journal titles identified in various bibliographies that were actually cited in ERIC. Of 132 titles identified, 49 were cited in ERIC. The average percent of coverage was 38.7%. African American journals were well above the average, women's journals well below.

Table 4. Journal Titles Cited in ERIC			
	No. Identified	No. in ERIC	Percent
African Americans	24	15	62.5%
American Indians	25	8	32.0%
Women	38	6	15.8%
Multicultural	45	20	44.4%
TOTALS	132	49	

African American Studies. Twenty-four journals were identified with African American focus, of which 13 are listed in CIJE's "Source Journals Index" (May 1995). Two others have been cited in the ERIC CD-ROM for 1992-March 1995. Thus 15 journals or 62.5% of the titles cited by the selected bibliographies, are referenced in ERIC.

American Indian Studies. Twenty-five journals were identified with American Indian focus, of which eight, or 32%, are indexed in ERIC.

Women's Studies. Thirty-eight journals were identified with women's themes, of which six, or 15.8%, are indexed in ERIC.

Multicultural Studies. Forty-five journals were identified with multicultural themes, of which 18 are listed in "Source Journals Index" (May 1995). Two others have been cited in the ERIC CD-ROM for 1992-March 1995. Thus 20 journals, or 44.4%, were indexed in ERIC.

Comparing the four topic areas, African Americans are best represented in journal titles, followed by Multicultural Issues, American Indians and Women. The lack of references to women's studies journals is especially noteworthy.

Step 4. Subject Access. The new 13th edition of the *Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors* (1995) has added a number of new descriptors to enhance subject access to multicultural issues. The following descriptors support women's research: Caregiver Child Relationship, Caregiver Role, Feminization of Poverty, and Rural Women.

For American Indian research, 18 new descriptors enable more precise searching with the addition of 16 names of native American tribes or groups, including the variant names Dakota and Lakota, as well as Tribal Government and Tribally Controlled Education. These improvements are essential to the effective study of the diverse American Indian cultures.

Other new descriptors that enhance subject access to multicultural research include Cultural Literacy, Cultural Maintenance, Disability Discrimination, Diversity (Institutional), Homophobia, Inclusive Schools, Normalization (Disabilities), Punjabi, and Romanian. (Houston 1995, ix-x). The terms Negro Housing and Black Housing have been eliminated, along with Ethnic Grouping, Racial Characteristics, and Racism. (Houston 1995, xii.)

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings in this investigation are very preliminary, however they tend to point to the following conclusions:

- ERIC offers a broad range of materials on multicultural education, representing pedagogical issues, resources for the classroom, and information on many cultural groups.
- In terms of bibliographies, ERIC appears to be strongest in multicultural and women's issues, weaker in American Indian

studies, weakest for materials on African Americans. This indicates the relative depth of coverage and the degree to which nontraditional information sources are available.

- For journal access, ERIC appears to be strong in multicultural issues and African American studies, weaker in American Indian studies, weakest in women's issues. This indicates the degree of recognition of the journal literature for ERIC selection purposes.
- Descriptors provide excellent access to issues of multicultural education but uneven access to individual cultural group issues, both because of descriptors that are too broad and because of selection practices.

These results seem to indicate an interesting balance between journals and bibliographies as sources of information. Where there are fewer journals indexed (women's studies), there are more bibliographies. Where there are more journals (African Americans), there are fewer bibliographies. These two issues are not necessarily even tradeoffs. The price for this balance, is limited access to Feminist journals and African-American bibliographies.

Further study is needed to identify additional women's studies journals of quality with education-related contents. The lack of representation of feminist material seems to underline Grant and Millar's (1992) findings that multicultural research by women is not accepted as quality research among mainstream reviewers.

Throughout the four topic areas, bibliographies give uneven coverage of groups and issues--deep in one geographic area or community issue, with no coverage in other areas. A policy of commissioning bibliographies for the ERIC document collection could help to remedy this unevenness. The lack of scholarly bibliographies in African American studies is a critical limitation to the depth of research available for educators developing curricula in this area. Fugitive materials and primary sources become virtually inaccessible without adequate bibliographies. Though some of these references may be available in other more specialized databases and indexes, it is the ERIC database that is most universally available to teachers.

What do these findings mean for librarians advising graduate students in education? ERIC is a rich and comprehensive research tool. Coverage of multicultural issues is extensive and growing. Access is improving as new descriptors are added to the *Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors*. Bibliographies give access to primary sources and fugitive material in many fields, though not all. For most curriculum development purposes, students are not unduly limited by relying exclusively on ERIC, however deep research into specific cultural areas

will require access to more specialized indexes. Following are selected databases and indexes in the chosen topic areas:

Alternative Press Index
America History and Life
American Indian Index
Bibliography of Native North Americans on Disc
Ethnic NewsWatch on CD-ROM
Human Relations Area Files (HRAF)
Index to Black Periodicals
Women's Studies Abstracts

To guide students searching on ERIC and other resources, librarians could suggest a combination of strategies, using the thesaurus to select descriptors, then enhancing the search with free-text searching for precise cultural concepts and concerns.

Several areas invite further research. A more controlled investigation should further evaluate journal titles on ERIC. Investigations should address ERIC's resources in other cultural areas, such as Hispanic American studies, Asian American studies, gay and lesbian concerns, disabled cultures, mountain, urban and rural cultures. Other databases such as PsycLIT should also be examined.

Multicultural issues impact every aspect of American society in every geographic region. ERIC is leading the way in providing information to enlighten these issues for educators, but could do more to broaden and deepen access to ethnic and cultural information. I look forward to continuing this examination of ERIC and broadening it to other databases in the ongoing effort to provide the most appropriate resources for the Lesley College community, both on-campus and off-campus.

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